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SECRET--COMMENTS ON THE GEOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF [REDACTED]

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CIA 16APR74

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PROPOSED SAUDI ARABIA/SUBSAHARAN PIPELINE PROJECT

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16 April 1974

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MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED] National
Intelligence Officer for Energy

SUBJECT : Comments on the geographic aspects of
[REDACTED]
proposed Saudi Arabia/SubSaharan
Pipeline Project.

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PHYSICAL SETTING

2. Except in northern Algeria, the African section of the pipeline will pass through an area of extreme dryness -- a true desert. Annual precipitation is everywhere less than 50 mm and is so variable that much of the area may go years without a drop of rain. The route was well chosen, however, with regard to terrain. Elevations range from 200 to 500 meters and the land is mostly flat to rolling. The route does not appear to pass through any large areas of sand, except for a short stretch in the Erg du Tenere in Niger.

POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT

3. Except in northern Algeria population is sparse all along the pipeline route. Population density maps generally show fewer than two people per square mile but even these are clustered in a few scattered oases so that most of the area is empty. The oases dwellers are agriculturalists who live at a subsistence level. Nomadic herding of sheep, goats and camels is confined to the wetter highlands of the Air, Tibesti and Ahaggar Mountains.

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4. It is probable that the population is about as dense as the water resources of the area will support. Considerable quantities of water underlie vast stretches of the Sahara, primarily in sandstone and limestone aquifers, but at depths of 800 to 2000 (or more) feet. Development of this water would be expensive and, considering other factors such as transportation costs and poor soils, could not support a commercial agricultural economy that would be competitive with more climatically favored regions to the north and south.

5. Transportation systems along the pipeline route are virtually nonexistent. In the east the pipeline will cross the Wadi Halfa-Abu Hamid road and railroad, in Sudan, and its western portion roughly parallels the road which runs from Agadez, Niger, to Algiers, Algeria. The only other transport routes are widely separated dirt tracks.

6. At present there are few known exploitable mineral resources along the pipeline route. Sudan has some small deposits of iron and gold in the mountains along the Red Sea but the rest of the northern half of the country is underlain by deep strata of horizontal sandstone and conglomerates which holds little promise of mineralization. The Tibesti Mountains in Chad have known deposits of tungsten and tin but they have not been exploited. The Air Mountains in Niger have deposits of uranium as well as tin and tungsten. Uranium is by far the most important; it is being exploited by a French company, and other uranium deposits in the same area are being surveyed. The Air Mountain deposits are the only ones in the study area that are being commercially exploited. The Ahaggar Mountains in Algeria have known deposits of uranium, diamonds and platinum but as yet they have not proved to be worth mining. The only other mining activity is salt which is mined for local use.

7. The energy crisis has spurred oil and gas exploration in all the countries along the pipeline route. However, to date, no known exploitable reserves have been found. There is a deposit of low-grade oil shale in the Tibesti Mountains but its discoverer, the French firm Petropar, did not consider it commercially exploitable. In 1963 there were rumors of an oil find

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[REDACTED] near the town of Tokro, which is very near the pipeline route, but nothing developed from the find. Much of the area of northern Chad and Niger is underlain by marine limestones with favorable trap structures, but the French have been exploring the area for petroleum since the 1950's, so the possibility of a large undiscovered field must be considered slight. The Sudan sector holds little promise because its underlying rocks are primarily of continental origin.

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- 3 -

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